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# A FRENCH "KASHMIR" SHAWL IN THE COLLECTION OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

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This paper proposes a French provenance for a rare and superb long white shawl<sup>1</sup> in the collection of the Textile Study Room (TSR) of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This shawl has generally been thought to have been woven in Kashmir from a French design because of its weave structure, double weft-interlocked 2/2 twill, a characteristically Indian technique. The quality of the shawl is comparable to the finer Kashmir and French shawls of the earlier 19th c.; there are between 43 and 53 wefts per centimeter of goat hair in 12 colors used so effectively there appear to be many more. New evidence, both documentary and technical, suggests that the shawl was not only designed but also woven in France in a tapestry weave but using a mechanical pattern mechanism, and that it may have won for its makers not only a Gold Medal at the 1849 Exhibition of Agricultural and Industrial products in Paris but also the Council Medal at the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851.

The 1849 French jury praised the gold medal-winning shawl of Messieurs Deneirouse and Boisglavy as "a genre as new as it is extraordinary; it is a melange of natural French flowers and Kashmir detail. Roses, carnations, dahlias are astonished to find themselves in the middle of the age-old detail that one calls the Indian type."<sup>1</sup> The Rapport also reveals that Deneirouse, an elder of the industry, had returned to shawl-making with this new partnership. According to the Jury, the shawl in question--long, white, in "travail de l'Inde", created a sensation with the public. ("Travail de l'Inde", "Espoliné" and "spouliné" are all French terms for 2/2 double-interlocked weft twill.) "We congratulate Monsieur Deneirouse in particular for the great success he has just achieved ... because, of all his colleagues, he is perhaps the only one who never despaired of producing a spouliné shawl."<sup>2</sup> And later, noting that Deneirouse and Boisglavy have also exhibited the same design in a conventional French Jacquard-woven version, the jurors report: "for the first time, one can compare the effect of Indian and French work. The appearance of the shawls is the same, only the work is different; only one is worth 5000 francs, the other worth 1000-1200."<sup>3</sup>

In 1851, the jury for woven shawls at the London Exhibition gave its highest award, the Council Medal, to Deneirouse, E, Boisglavy and Co. "...for a long white shawl, made precisely upon the same principles as those of Kashmir, and distinguished by the character of "spouliné." This shawl is of particularly fine texture and design, combining natural flowers, in all their various tints, with the style peculiar to India;



it is perfect in all respects."<sup>4</sup> A more complete description is to be found in the Supplementary Report on Design, written by Richard Redgrave, R.A.,<sup>5</sup> which speaks of a French shawl in which "the Indian pine form, exaggerated in all its peculiarities, is filled with imitative flowers, the size of nature, naturally drawn and shaded, with such minute imitation that even insects have been depicted on their surface. The variation of some flowers, as tulips and asters, and the shading of others, as roses, etc., is substituted for the diapering of color which is characteristic of the style." While it is certainly possible that Deneirouse and Boisglavy created a second "spouliné" shawl with a similar design, it is at least as plausible that the 1849 prize-winning shawl was sufficiently unique to justify exhibiting it in London as well. Unfortunately, an exhaustive search failed to uncover an illustration of the prize-winning shawl in either exhibition.

In the TSR shawl, a perfect expression of the "horror vacui" so characteristic of mid-19th c. Western taste, there are myriad European naturalistically drawn and shaded flowers, including those in the aforementioned reports, and a profusion of both Western and Indian fantasy flowers arranged so that the design seems to have been built up in layers. (See fig. 1.) The bottom layer consists of flat Indian style floral and foliate ornament and innumerable small botehs. In the middle layer there are barely discernible ribbon-outlined botehs. It is within the uppermost layer that one finds the most naturalistic flowers and the least regard for appearances of organic growth; for example, a floral cluster containing a blue dahlia is combined with sprays of smaller flowers and then superimposed on the existing design rather than integrated into it. And the "...insects...depicted on [the] surface" of which Redgrave speaks are visible in fig. 2.

It seems likely that such floral placement was intended to convey three-dimensionality, an inclusion which horrified Redgrave, the author of the Supplementary Report. He enumerated the three principles which the shawl designer should follow: 1) invariably flat forms without perspective or imitative rendering, 2) flat tints without shading and 3) single hues of the same color. And he concluded about the offending shawl: "great pains and labour have evidently been bestowed on the design, yet the result contrasts unfavourably with the neighbouring Cashmere pattern...It is sincerely hoped that this false manner will be abandoned; that when imitations are intended they will be in a pure style, and when novelty is sought for it will not be attempted by thus outraging true principles. ... it is meretricious and unsound; it may be the novelty of a season, but it is built on a false foundation and will never last."<sup>6</sup>

The French 1849 Jury took a wait and see approach to the future of the new style: "The general effect is new, bold; is it a starting point, is it a happy eccentricity? The most daring



dare not say."<sup>7</sup> Godey's Lady's Book in November, 1850, had no such problem: "...for ourselves, we prefer the Parisian shawls, the fabric being softer, and the patterns, bouquets and wreaths of flowers much more graceful than the everlasting palm."<sup>8</sup> As though in rejoinder Redgrave continued: "...Let the designer throw away, if he pleases, the Indian forms--the Indian pine form, perhaps the sooner the better, since it never had any symbolic significance with us, and it has long ceased to have beauty of line, tormented as it is into every possible variation from the normal form."<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt that European shawl buyers agreed with at least part of Redgrave's conclusion. They made clear time and again their preference for shawls embellished with the flat, diapered ornament which remained an Indian signature. Of course, they also had the bad taste to prefer the boteh, however distorted it became. These two expressions of the exotic Orient remained central to the appeal of both the Kashmir shawl and its imitations despite sixty-five years of periodic and occasionally successful efforts by European shawl makers to challenge the Indian favorites with Parisian designs. However, the designs of Indian shawls also changed in response to the French designs. These utilized an increasingly large portion of the shawl's surface, until in both Indian and European shawls only a tiny center medallion remained undecorated.

The accurately depicted Western flowers in the TSR shawl are significant in several respects. The first is as evidence of a French artistic rejection of Orientalism that corresponded to the rise of the Second Republic in 1848. It is no accident that the "vegetal style" of shawl design which was characterized by floral and foliate forms drawn with exceptional freedom and richness of detail, first appeared in 1848 and was abandoned by 1852.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the brevity of its fashion reign is one of the factors which enable us to date the shawl at hand. Shawl design of the period is particularly well-documented by a series of dated drawings and gouaches by the famed French shawl designer, Anthony Berrus.<sup>11</sup> Of the several Berrus designs which are closely related to the TSR shawl, an unpublished drawing from a notebook dated 1848-50 shows many similarities, among them the boteh almost obscured by vegetation.<sup>12</sup> Other Berrus designs include the châle à pivot, another innovation of the period, in which the design revolves 180 degrees around a center point.<sup>13</sup> Although the relationship between the "vegetal style" and the Third Republic cannot be more fully explored here, it would appear that the abandonment of the boteh by the vanguard of French shawl designers was at least in part an expression of chauvinism.

One must not underestimate, however, the role of the business of fashion as an impetus to design change. Then, as now, to create obsolescence in a wardrobe was to sell replacements. As expressed by the 1849 French Rapport: "Who could believe



that to survive and prosper, the shawl would have to change its style and look so often? ...and that a woman who wants to follow fashion, that divinity most French, would be obliged to abandon her most beautiful garment in a state of perfect conservation because its style is already outdated and its colors no longer harmonize with the taste of the moment."<sup>14</sup>

Deneirouse's naturalistic flowers may also have been significant because the Indians had not produced a shaded flower using the 2/2 double-interlocking weft twill technique. Deneirouse believed the omission was due to technical inability rather than choice and it was with pride in his own accomplishment that in his 1851 Traité he cited the twill tapestry shawl representing natural flowers which he had made by mechanical means and exhibited in 1849.<sup>15</sup>

It is very difficult to be precise about the nature of Deneirouse's invention because it appears that the information he published was incomplete, and his diagrams either intentionally or inadvertently misleading.<sup>16</sup> The difficulty is compounded by his use of technical terms which have lost their contemporary meaning or which he may have used idiosyncratically.

Nevertheless, it is possible to understand the surprising concept at which he had arrived: speed and cost-cutting through simplification, and a return to some principles of the drawloom rather than a more-complicated version of the Jacquard. Deneirouse derived his "moyens mécaniques" from the Jacquard, eliminating the cylinder, batten, perforated cards and the need for preliminary reading. He claimed it required no more than a double harness loom, the mise-en-carte and a mechanism fitted with 100 needles and 400 hooks, to execute even the most complicated designs which extend the full length and width of a shawl.<sup>17</sup> The mise-en-carte was painted on papier briqueté in which the segments were staggered like brickwork, an invention for which he claimed credit.<sup>18</sup> He claimed the process of reading the mise-en-carte while working had been made so simple that a child could do it.<sup>19</sup> And his system required only one adult and two children instead of 3 adults, thereby cutting costs considerably.

Tapestry weaving requires many bobbins since no weft is continuous selvage to selvage. To speed this laborious process and further cut costs by enabling the weaver to find the right bobbin "at a glance", Deneirouse devised a board which had holes drilled in it to hold the bobbins while they were not in use. The holes were 8 mm in diameter so that bobbins that were only 2mm in diameter could be picked up and replaced "with ones eyes closed."<sup>20</sup> The thinness of the bobbins facilitated the manipulation of the warp threads, speeding the weaving. Since the bobbins had to be separately manipulated one after the other, the design could stop wherever one wished, so one simply used as many mise-en-cartes as needed for the size of the



design.<sup>21</sup>

In order to speed its completion in time for the 1849 Exhibition, the shawl was made in six horizontal sections. The harlequin borders were woven separately and then attached. Similar means of joining were used for all the seams: selected warps at irregular intervals were re-entered in both directions; the other warps were either clipped very close where the pieces were butted or remained longer to form a tiny "fringe." The seams between the bottom three sections were executed with such consummate skill that it can be difficult to locate them on the back even after one knows where they are. The next three seams have been joined with progressively less care, presumably because the deadline for completion of the shawl was fast approaching.

The layout of the shawl, which the French call "demi-pivot," consists of three vertical sections. [See fig. 3.] The design of the center section revolves 180 degrees around the center point. At first glance, the sides form what appears to be a châle a quart, in which the 4 sections are symmetrical along vertical and horizontal axes. Actually, only the sections lettered "B" are symmetrical in relation to both axes while the sections lettered "A", "C" and "D" are symmetrical vertically. Along the vertical axes one finds the most puzzling feature of the shawl: a group of long warp floats, indicated by the double lines in fig. 4, which occur in a pattern of what we now know is called revolving symmetry, and which appear to be related to the pattern repeat. Hopefully, the Deneirouse treatise will eventually yield the solution to the mystery of their presence.

The sections lettered "A" and "D" in the layout are almost identical in decoration. In the "D" sections only, there is a configuration which includes a lily and a cluster of small flowers. At the corresponding place in the "A" sections the decoration is confined to Indian style flowers and foliage. While such an arrangement is unusual for shawl design, it is commonplace in European damask napkins and tablecloths where it has been used at least as far back as the early 18th c. as can be seen in a napkin from Cooper-Hewitt's collection.<sup>22</sup> By the 19th c. such layouts were sufficiently traditional to have been familiar to textile designers working for Deneirouse.

One might argue that none of the evidence presented thus far precludes the TSR shawl from having been made in Kashmir from a French design, and then woven in Kashmir. The very French coloring, for example, might indicate simply that the shawl was intended for the French market. But there are oddities about the weaving itself that one would not find in a Kashmir shawl. The most singular is the profusion of longer weft floats found on the back of three of the shawl sections. This is evidence of an effort to use fewer bobbins, again in the interest of



speed and economy. It seems likely that the shawl was woven by two weavers on two looms because the sections with the dense, long weft floats on the back fall in analogous positions with respect to the design. The occasional use of single-interlocked weft twill is another short-cut not found in Indian shawls.

In addition, the stepped diagonals which can be clearly seen in the TSR shawl are a result of the effect of papier briqueté on diagonals with and against the direction of the twill, as shown in figure 13 of plate 5 of Deneirouse's 1851 treatise. The stepped diagonals are also due to the structure being mechanically coordinated with the pattern in the Deneirouse system whereas because of the independence of the pattern from the foundation structure in an Indian shawl, the Indian weavers could produce a neat diagonal if they chose, especially for a shawl of exceptional quality.

The conclusive factor in eliminating the possibility of an Indian provenance for the TSR shawl is the fiber analysis I performed with the assistance of the head of the Microscopy section of the Institut Textile de France.<sup>23</sup> The micrograph in fig. 5 shows a longitudinal section of a red warp thread taken from the center of the bottom of the shawl. It can be clearly seen that there are two distinct fibers: those with the scales are Pashmina, or goat hair; the others are silk.

A mixture of silk and wool fibers in a thread can be seen quite easily under a thread counter, because the two fibers absorb color differently, the silk absorbing less. The difference should be discernible even in a white thread because the silk fiber is much shinier than the wool. Used in order to strengthen the warp, the silk/goat hair blend threads have been used in the French shawls known as "châles riches" at least since 1820 and as late as 1875,<sup>24</sup> and Blair's treatise on Paisley shawls tells us that the finest thread was made in Amiens, France.<sup>25</sup> The use of this very distinctive thread seems to be irrefutable evidence that the shawl was made in Europe, since there is no known instance of it having been used in the warp of a Kashmir shawl.<sup>26</sup>

The elimination of other European shawl producing centers as possible sources of the TSR shawl is based largely on negative evidence. If any of the others had succeeded in creating an Indian-technique shawl, it would surely have won at least a mention in the Jury Reports of the 1851 Exhibition. Instead, the introduction to the Shawl section refers to "spouliné" as "the exact imitation of the Kashmirean" and notes only the excellent examples now "attained" in Paris.<sup>27</sup>

The TSR shawl is French in design and manufacture. In its expression of the technical and design innovations of the mid-19th c., it is surely a French cultural signature. Whether or not it is the Deneirouse/Boisglavy shawl cannot be stated with

certainty; a continuing search for engravings of the Council Medal-winning shawl at the Crystal Palace Exhibition and ongoing efforts to interpret Deneirouse's Treatise may yet provide a definitive answer.

**Acknowledgements:** I have been encouraged and assisted from the beginning of this project by colleagues in both North America and Europe, all of whom I wish I could mention here and will properly credit in the next version of this paper. For the moment, however, I must single out Monique Levi-Strauss; without her generosity this paper would not exist.



### Endnotes

1. The color of a shawl usually refers to the foundation color of its center.
1. M.Gaussen and M. Roux Carbonnel, Reporters in Rapport du Jury Central sur les Produits de l'Agriculture et de l'Industrie exposés en 1849, Tome III, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, MDCCCL, pp. 94, 100.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Reports by the Juries on the Subjects in the Thirty Classes into which the Exhibition Was Divided, London Exhibition, 1851. Class XXX, p. 379.
5. London, November, 1851. p.747
6. Supplementary Report, p.747
7. Rapport, p. 94.
8. Quoted by E. Mikosch in "The Scent of Flowers", Textile Museum Journal, 1985, p. 18.
9. Supplementary Report, p. 747.
10. This relationship and other aspects of the documents cited in this paper and the history of shawl weaving and design of the period will be discussed in another paper.
11. Monique Levi-Strauss deals extensively with Berrus in her book The Cashmere Shawl op. cit.
12. Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Departement des Dessins, CD5436, v.3.
13. Monique Levi-Strauss, The Cashmere Shawl. London,: The Dryad Press, 1987. pp. 98, 107.
14. Rapport, p. 93.
15. Deneirouse, Traité sur la Fabrication des Châles des Indes, Paris: Papeterie Industrielle et Commerciale de Dessaigne, 1851, pp. 43-44. It was much later in the 19th c. that shaded flowers sometimes appeared on Indian Jamawar fabric, but even then they were rare.
16. Although as a technician Deneirouse was not trained to express himself on paper, deliberate obfuscation is also undoubtedly part of the reason his treatise is so difficult to decipher. Monsieur Vial, technical secretary of CIETA, who

discussed the Deneirouse treatise in the 1983 Lyon catalogue, Le châle cachemire en France au XIXe siècle, told me he is convinced that Deneirouse deliberately omitted some important elements of both his illustrations and the explanations accompanying them. (Conversation with Gabriel Vial, Lyon, May 2, 1988.)

17. Deneirouse, Traité, p.45.

18. Deneirouse, Traité, p.13

19. Deneirouse, Traité, p.45.

20. Deneirouse, Traité, pp. 47, 82-84.

21. Deneirouse, Traité, p.48.

22. Cooper-Hewitt 1984-82-12, Napkin, South Netherlands, 1st quarter 18th c.

23. June 11 and 12, 1987, under the supervision and with the assistance of M. Roger Monrocq, head of the "Section Microscopie Optique" at the Institut Textile de France. Information on fibers supplied by M. Monrocq from Matthews' Textile Fibers, 194e7, 5th ed. by Herbert Mauersberger, N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons).

24. Mme. Levi-Strauss has documented the use of blended silk and wool threads in French shawls in her exhibition catalogues and her book The Cashmere Shawl. The earliest documented use of the blended thread (goat hair and silk) appears to have been in a Parisian shawl made about 1820. The blended thread is also used in the warps of the great French shawls of the 1830's like the "Isphahan" and "Nou Rouz" shawls. By 1840 wool was sometimes used in place of the goat hair, usually in French shawls of a slightly inferior quality. As late as 1875, the warp of a very finely woven French shawl was made with the wool/silk blend. Kashmeersjaals, The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1985-86. also documents the use of blended thread.

25. M. Blair, The Paisley Shawl, Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1904.

26. I examined over 30 shawls and shawl fragments dating between 1830-1860 from the A.E.D.T.A. collection, and several more in the collections of the Indian Dept. at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. None showed the use of a blended silk and wool or goat fleece warp thread, nor has any such thread been found in a published Indian shawl whose fiber composition has been analyzed.

27. Reports by the Juries, Class XV, B.-Shawls, p.378.





Figure 1



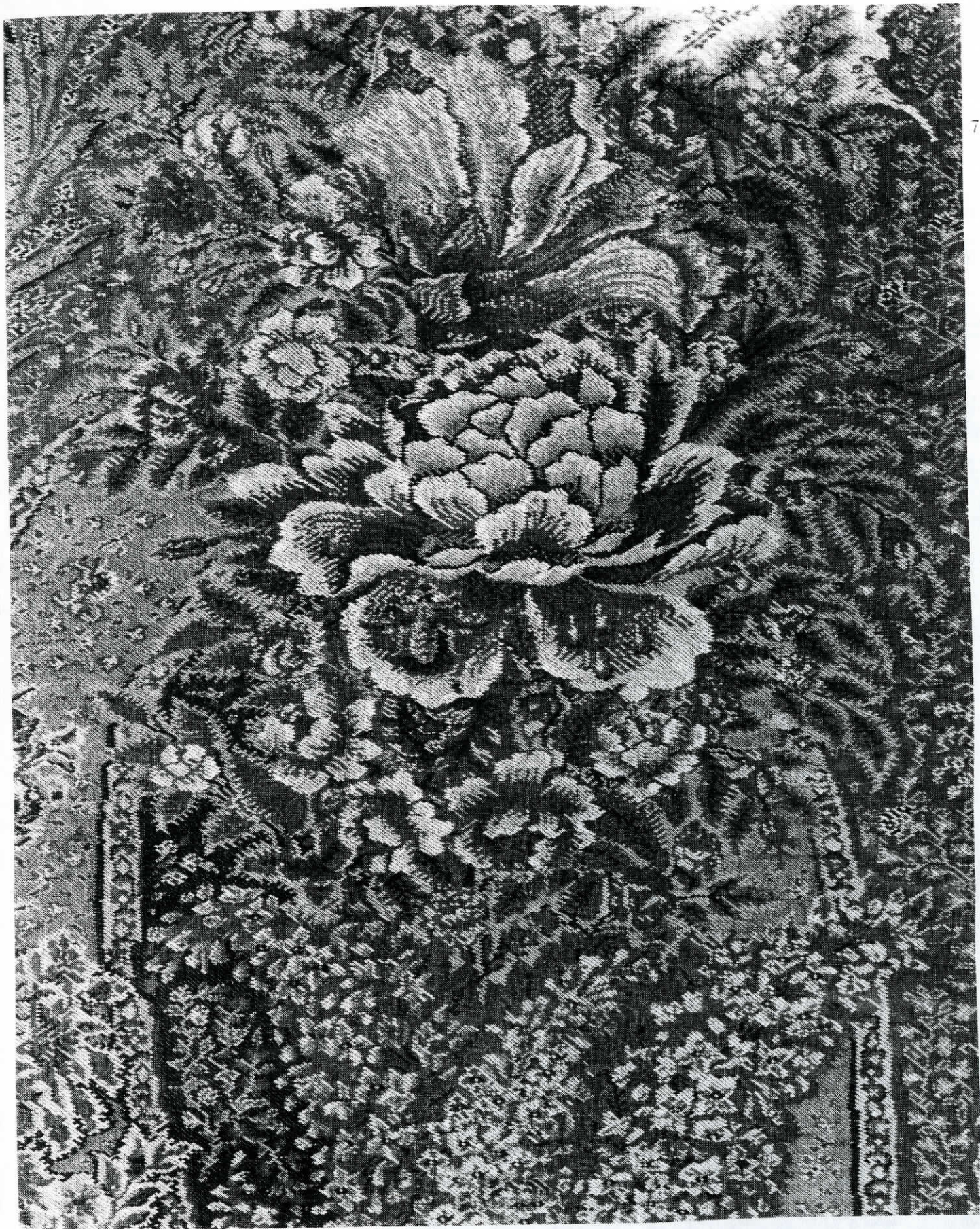


Figure 2



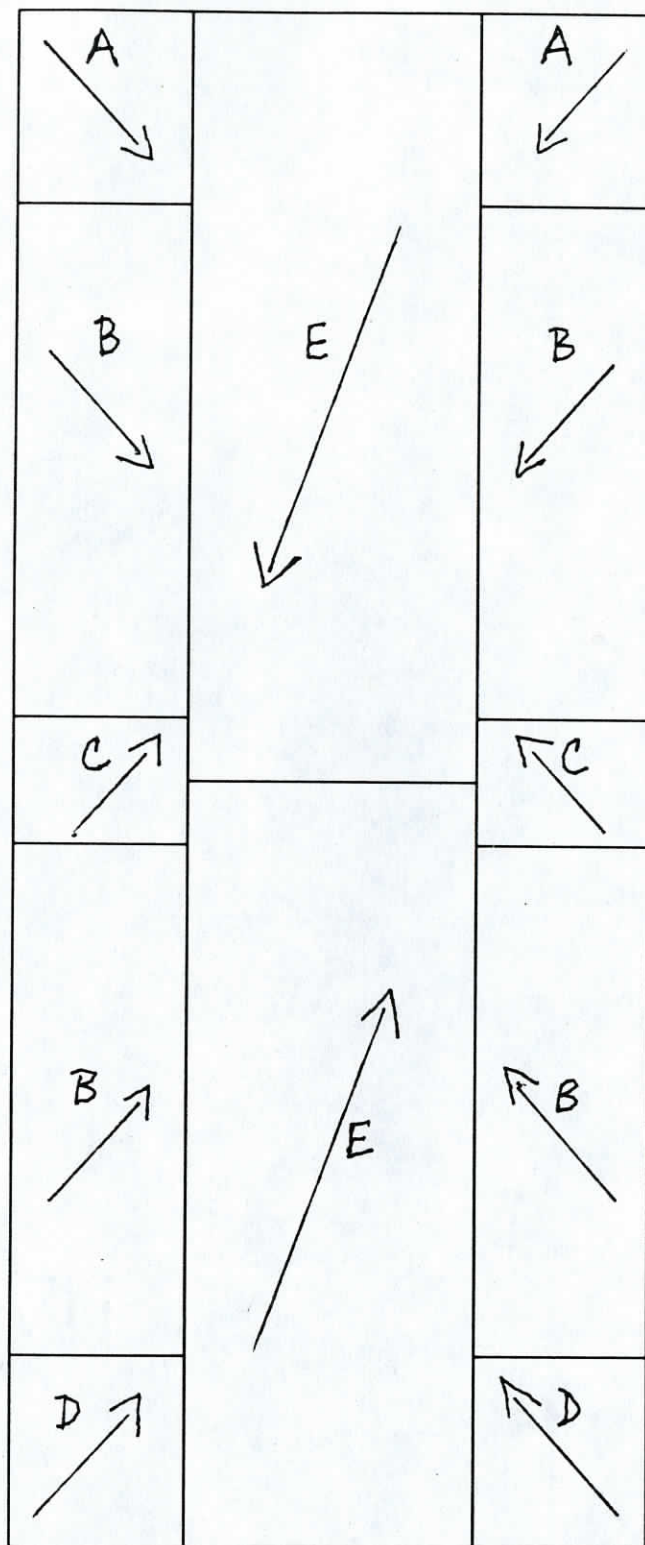


Figure 3

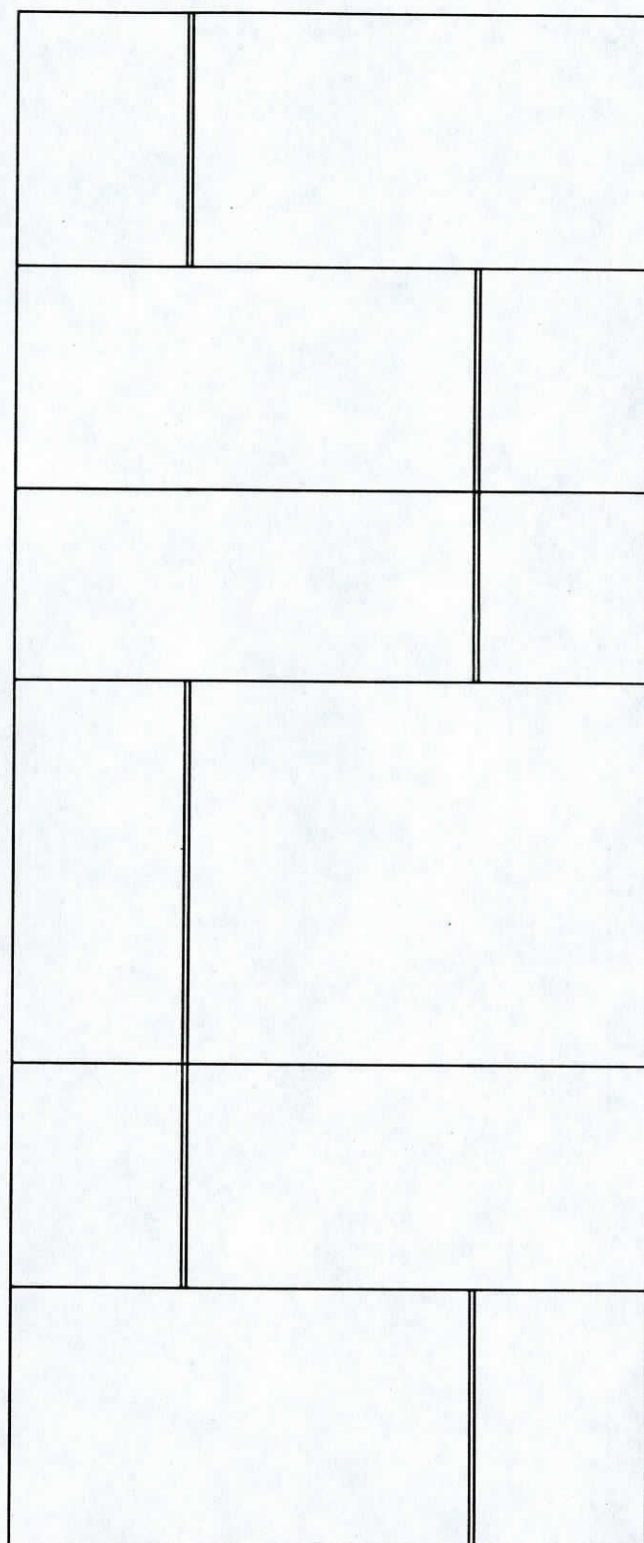


Figure 4





Figure 5